

THE LADY OF THE LAGOON

BY EMERSON HOUGH AUTHOR OF "THE LADY OF THE LAGOON" "JOHN RAWN"

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.
Kitty Gray, a newspaper woman, finds a curio shop full of a broken coin, the mutilated half of a gold piece, and she is curious to find out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and eventually, she discovers her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin.

Kitty calls on Frederick, who attempts to detain her. She is rescued by Count Sachio, who had shadowed her as the young American, and then had become her friend because of Frederick's ingratitude. King Michael gives Kitty the other half of the coin, but she sends it back to him. She hears of a plot to depose the monarch and warns him. He accepts the warning and Kitty accompanies him to the black and white ball where he was to be given back the throne. The king receives the package Kitty sent and tells her to open it. And she opens it in triumph in front of Frederick.

Brought before King Michael of Gretzhothen, Kitty Gray, confessing the object of her visit, is given the other half of the broken coin. It bears the words: "Tore down the throne of the king."

Later, fearing that the half coin will be stolen from her, she sends it back to the king by way of a messenger. A plot against the monarch and warns him not to drink any wine at the ball that evening.

FOURTH INSTALLMENT.

CHAPTER XVI.

If Your Majesty Please.
The full view of the spectators, who now had left the dancing floor and gathered in groups at a respectful distance from royalty, Kitty received the envelope from the messenger—the same packet which she had herself sent to the palace that morning for delivery at midnight.

She did this with a fine air of insouciance, for she felt quite sure that success now had met all her plans; nor did the outward appearance of the packet afford any reason to suspect otherwise.

Yet, even as she took the envelope in her hand, there came to her a sharp conviction that something was wrong. It had a strange lightness—it did not seem quite the same as when she herself had sealed it that morning. Hastily, she opened the envelope, her lips compressed. It was empty!

Yes, the mysterious coin was gone. Entrusted to the safest messenger she could find, sent to the king himself, received by the king's trusted official, guarded, as was to be supposed, every moment of the time since it had left her hands—none the less, the coin had disappeared as though some specter hand had abstracted it.

The blank look of surprise which came to her face was something not to be mistaken. King Michael frowned. "What is this, mademoiselle? Are we made the subject of some sport? How now?"

Count Frederick himself, who stood nearby, was quite much surprised as Kitty at the denouement of this little play which had been devised by her. Had his own man then lied to him—had he also been made the subject of some jest? For it may be remembered that he himself had taken means of his own to secure possession of the coin before it could reach the hands of the king.

Kitty stood regarding first one, then the next of the faces about her. On the countenance of Count Frederick she read only chagrin and surprise equal to her own. There was no trace of guilty knowledge there—she was sure of that. Whatever had been his own plans in regard to the elusive bit of metal, surely his dires had been thwarted now as fully as her own. Then another hand came into the game! Some other mind also was interested in the mysterious coin of Gretzhothen. Yet other machinations were to be added to those, so obvious, of the drama of the coin and its rapidly changing ownership.

"What then, mademoiselle?" demanded Michael, himself not yet so fully advised as others regarding the nature of this packet which had been intended for him. "What was it that you were so good as to intend sending us?"

Kitty dared not answer this direct question. She concluded quickly that it would be far safer to add as little as possible to the number of those who knew the full story of the traveling coin.

"Your majesty," said she, turning upon him so dazzling a smile as would have made any man forget all else. "It was nothing! It was but a small favor I would have sent your majesty, to show the acknowledgement of my own country, since your majesty had done such honor to me tonight. Perhaps some one in my humble menage has been unfaithful—if so, it was but small loss after all, if your majesty will forget it and give me a few added days of grace, I will explain—I will try, again, I hope with greater fortune."

Michael was ready enough to agree to anything which would bring back to his society this dazzling young creature who stood beside him. Moreover, he was mentally weary by now, this being due in part to the enforced sobriety of any. He ever was willing to avoid anything difficult of solution, and now was ready to turn to themes less exciting than this play of wit.

"Very well, mademoiselle," said he, "as you like."

A certain relief was felt by all concerned, as the king and the young American, of whose origin, he knew, and apparently cared to know nothing whatever, were the observed of all. Michael at least could dance, and as for Kitty, she was an American girl.

As they swept on in the evolutions of the dance, Kitty caught sight of the dark face of Count Sachio. He himself was not dancing, but stood aloof, at the edge of the space occupied by the dancers. His eyes were fixed upon her with an expression which she could not fathom.

That she had earned this man's dislike, or at least, she had deeply hurt his masculine vanity. Kitty was well enough aware. Yet it seemed this could not quite account for the strange expression on his face, as he gazed intently at her and her royal partner. She jumped at the conclusion that Sachio himself also had some interest—what or how much she could not divine—in this same troublesome coin. Yes, Sachio, also had been on observation in this little drama, but now, as she was watching her—she must watch him.

night—for what reason he, as yet, could not guess. He had had no opportunity to examine Kitty as to her reason for the warning she had sent him. His attitude toward Count Frederick, therefore, was somewhat cold, and that noble was forced to receive in public the snub royal. Moreover, Michael retained in his memory the suspicion that Sachio had come to his palace on somewhat the same errand as Count Frederick himself. He, therefore, also failed to see Count Sachio, as he stood near by, although he passed him repeatedly. On the whole, King Michael was none too happy at this great pleasure party which he had planned, nor disposed to make others happy.

Count Frederick evaded the throngs about the king. Unwillingly he turned away his eyes from the beautiful figure of the young American as she danced. He never had seen a woman who thrilled him thus. He himself did not dance. This was no evening of pleasure for him. He had other plans. His attitude toward King Michael was wholly indifferent as that of royalty itself toward him. If, indeed, all was to come to the test tonight—if revolution was to ensue—if the people were to set in power another king—it would make small difference

on the instant the opportunity for himself to strengthen his own position in the king's good graces.

"Your majesty," exclaimed the astute nobleman, now advancing and offering his hand, "forgive me! I was in fault today in my conduct toward your majesty. 'Twas but a mad jest of my own. Give me but opportunity to prove my loyalty to your person and our country, and you shall not find me lacking. I shall not attempt to deny that, but give me leave to handle them, your majesty, and I promise you safety. I promise you to send them away. They shall not wreck the government of which your majesty is the head—you shall be their king!"

"You are indeed my friend, after all, Count Frederick," exclaimed Michael. "That you counsel seems wise. Use your own discretion, but disperse them—disperse them!"

Looking from one to the other, Kitty Gray saw what seemed to her the pitiable spectacle of a king so weak as to lack confidence in his own powers, so unkingly as to resort to the aid of a man whom but now he had been will-

places. See that these places are filled now, and that the toast shall be, 'Long live King Michael!'

"We may not yet cry 'Long live King Frederick!'"

The nobleman shook his head. "Not yet," said he. "They still shall cry 'Long live King Michael! That will do for the time at least.'"

The leaders passed among the crowd. The emissaries, newly instructed, undid somewhat of the work they had had in hand. A movement began in the streets. Some left, here or there. Little groups formed, scattered, broke apart. Gradually the trend was toward the lower portions of the town, where now

wines might be had by those who had not bread at home.

Count Frederick returned through the great entryway and rejoined King Michael where he stood. "Your majesty," said he, "your people are returning to their homes."

"Frederick, my friend, my savior!" The weak king, his features working, grasped the hands of the stronger man. "You tell me they will disperse?"

"Even now they do so, your majesty."

"Thank God! How can I repay you this? I swear it, it was you they feared and obeyed, and not myself. Why is

too strong, the other too weak, to be of aid in her own plane—or, indeed, to be of aid to Gretzhothen itself. Well, after all, who was she, and what was her interest, that she should interfere in these matters? War might, perhaps, ensue between these two kingdoms, but if so, it would not be her fault, nor could it be prevented by herself. Obviously, the best thing for her would be to complete her own business and get clear away as soon as possible.

And yet, there arose to her once more the voice of the broken coin itself! It seemed to cry aloud to her, to conjure her—the voice of the people, long suffering, oppressed, devoid of hope—a people resigned to despair. What heart could close to such a cry as that? Kitty hesitated once more, drawn aside by the warm sympathies of her own heart.

"I will not crutch it," said she, unconsciously reverting to her own vernacular. "I'll see it through!"

The two women who talk she had overheard, passed now from behind the pillar toward the interior of the palace. Apparently they were known there and welcome, for surely they were not stopped by any of the king's guards or chamberlains, and Kitty herself, equally well identified, passed readily just

serve. I know well of the other half. Within four hours I will have both halves within my grasp. Events will happen this part of the night. Come to me tomorrow lodge in the forest, a neutral lands. That is the other half of the messenger to secure enough how. Have of it. Count Sachio, will show them all the re which has puzzled domes for so long."

"Hist!" called out t addressed himself more have ears, excellency! ful."

Kitty overheard this they might start to t cover her, darted down the grand salon. Havir for her purpose and s the secrets regarding she was willing enough and find her hotel. f approached more in h body as well as disl

Had she remained longer she might hav conspirators themselves were, did not see. The man peered in at th room which they oc could see now all the although he had not the latter at the time.

The two conspirators a little conversation. "Y at the lodge tomorrow Sachio resumed. 'Le possible. This city is what disappointed—the been a great ball nor a We may the leave. conge, shall start ea ing lodge—yes, you all? Do others know it? cautious man."

"Not many of this ci —yes—and that ap of can girl, the man folle ous enough in his w dog to her, although long ago he was a se Frederick himself."

"And as to the youn self."

Count Sachio turne



THEY CAPTURED THE ACCOMPLICE

what was his own attitude toward this weak king.

Count Frederick started toward the door before a second thought came to his mind. If there should for any reason be miscarriage of his plans—if there should be need for yet greater delay before his final overt act was committed—then he ought to have care to retain some footing in the king's good graces. Because, revolution or no revolution, the throne of Gretzhothen was not worth anything unless its owner had both halves of the missing coins. Frederick cared not to be a penniless king, and only the united coin could give him king of Gretzhothen actual wealth and actual power.

The murmurs of the people, vague, indefinite, had from time to time been audible at the open door of the grand entrance. They had gathered here about the palace in the expectation of witnessing the unfittness of their monarch—of seeing his disgrace. Many emissaries among them had primed them for that very advent—had suggested to them their own proper resentment of such a sight. But that spectacle had failed—Michael was sober! He was as much a king as could be made of him! The vis inertiae of the people, ready to endure the same evils rather than fight unknown ones, thus helped keep matters still in balance.

But as the strains of the great orchestra, the wailings of violin and flute, the throbblings of viol and saxophone rose and reached the ears of those waiting in the palace, as the sight of the richly clad dancers now and then became visible as they passed the wide windows, the envy and discontent of the people arose.

"Why do we starve while they dance?"

The old, old cry of the unfortunate and oppressed arose, whether dumb or in open voice, from the hearts of those who waited while the king and his favorites danced in the great black and white ball.

They began to edge towards the palace steps, a dark, dense mass. The soldiery were not easy to people, there with steel. The soldiers were themselves of the people. Moreover, they had had small cause for loyalty to the king and court of Gretzhothen. They were ill paid and ill governed.

The people lacked leadership. Count Frederick had hinged his own plans of action upon one event—the public disgrace of the king—and that event had not occurred. The hand that Kitty had taken in these matters had spoiled the plan to make the king a laughing stock. Moreover, there remained among the discontented in this throng many who still retained some loyalty to their king and to their government, who could not yet break the old forms of rule to which they had been accustomed.

"The people!" muttered Count Frederick to himself. "After all, one is obliged to count them in in matters of this kind."

He frowned as he stood looking out over the dense mass which filled the streets. Even he began to feel almost in spite of himself, some sort of a vague pity for these less fortunate ones. He began to think. His strong face grew serious. How, after all, could he help these people if he were their king? He eluded to himself. Not at all, unless he had a treasury, and he did not at all could he have a treasury unless he had the other half of this missing coin.

Still over the voice of the strings and under the low mutterings of the mob, strange to hear, impossible to describe. No one man raised his voice aloud—none had more than whispered as yet, but in the total, the volume became a thing definite, ominous, great, creature, dreadful if aroused. It seemed to convey the thought of a great dragon, still slumbering, yet stirring in his lair.

King Michael heard this sound. All heard it, this voice of the people, as yet undecided. The king's face paled—terror smote home upon his soul. The courage of his usual alcoholic stimulation being tonight denied him, his weak nerves gave way. His attitude now was not that of the commander, of the king, but of a man open for any suggestion, any advice. He looked this way and that for counsel—sought for some one who could offer him aid to a king who was afraid!

He saw Count Frederick now returning to the salon, from the great entrance door. The latter saw the terror of his monarch's face, and recognized

FREDERICK'S ROOM HAD BEEN ENTERED

ing to call his enemy. A genuine contempt for him overcame her, as she stood, a look of appraising seriousness upon her face.

"Perhaps your majesty will care no more for the dance?" said she. "Since the people seem to be discontented, and are not to join us in this enjoyment, perhaps your majesty soon will retire?"

"Yes, yes, excellency, we soon will retire from the dance." The face of Michael was agitated. It seemed to her that a trifle more and he would have shed tears!

Meantime, the holder man, Count Frederick, was basting once more to address the people, who now halted, uncertain as to what move next to make. His own agents had been among the people, and had made known his own plans. Yet here was their master, evidently, for some reason, disinclined to give the word for actual outbreak.

"My good people," began he, as he stood at the head of the great stairway above them—"his majesty thanks you for the honor you have done him in coming out upon this occasion. He himself has found great pleasure in coming here to meet you tonight, although he arose from a sick-bed to do so. He wishes you to be calm in these stirring days. He has planned this great ball in order that you might see the equality of his own soul in these events, so difficult alike for a king and his people to endure. Therefore, remain loyal to your king, whom I represent before you. The ballroom soon will be cleared. Let the streets also be cleared, do so with homes. Wait, and depend on you who have your true welfare at heart."

There surged up to him now the figures of more than one man, some in uniform, from places in the throng, in the street. "What is it—what is wrong—why do we not have the order to march on the palace?" they demanded eagerly.

"All is wrong," whispered Count Frederick to them. "For some reason, best known to himself, the king is not drunk tonight, but sober. His people are not turned against him—on the contrary, they seem to respect him more than they have done for months—there would be no revolt among them if we started open revolt now. Only the young men are for extreme measures. The older men, who knew the old king, remain loyal. It was the king's friend, Frederick, who counseled him to all his descendants. We could not unite them now, for they will love their king to the last possible moment. The only thing needed to destroy their confidence was what I promised you tonight—his public arrest. Almost, I wish I had not promised, for I could not deliver it. So our plans have failed. Any further attempt at revolution also would fail, for they will love their king to the last possible moment. Take them away from here—let them go to the drinking

that—why not myself? But, at least, I am sure that I have your aid and counsel with me all the time?"

"I shall be as you wish, your majesty."

Kitty, by this time, somewhat forgotten in the king's vacillating mind, stood looking from one to the other of these two. As she read the situation, it varied somewhat of defeat to her. An instant ago she herself had dominated the scene. Otherwise now, for Count Frederick gave her a somewhat sarcastic smile. It was the time of his triumph over her discomfiture.

"Mademoiselle is distraught," said he. "She is not dancing, she will return to her hotel, perhaps? What can one do for mademoiselle?"

"If I might ask one of you gentlemen to secure my car for me," Count Frederick smiled and bowed as he turned away.

But Kitty was not so soon to leave the great salon of the palace that night. She passed toward the entrance slowly, caught in the crush and confusion of others who were crowding out in the flaccid of the much vaunted black and white ball. For the time, she found herself in the shelter of a great column, where she was willing enough to pause. As she halted here she heard voices just behind her—one deep voice which seemed to her she had surely heard before.

"It is a pity that affair did not come off tonight, your excellency," she heard another whisper hoarsely. "We have everything in our own hands now. I have all the plans of the fortifications, the maps, the avenues, the specifications for each street crossing. It would have been entirely simple for the army of Gretzhothen to march through this ramshackle city as it liked."

"Yes," broke in the deep voice which haunted Kitty's memory. "I suppose so, but what would we do if we could not pay our troops the next day? How then, your excellency, would we be then be our own case? No, Frederick is right in his main plan. The throne is worth nothing—it is worthless in his kingdom or in our kingdom or in any other—a poverty stricken kingdom is no business for any man. Why have you not a diagram of the treasure's burial place—with that, now, the matter would be somewhat different tonight."

"Hush!" she heard the other voice whisper. Apparently warned, at least, by their suspicions, they moved away, although Kitty shifted her own position so that her presence was not known.

"So now," she thought to herself, "there are still other enemies for this little unfortunate kingdom of Gretzhothen. Its neighbor kingdom plans war against it—its own king is helpless—its people are oppressed—is it to be done in such a case?"

THEY WERE NEARLY DISCOVERED BY COUNT SACHIO

behind them as they walked, unnoticed in the scene of general disorder and confusion which obtained at the moment as the ball disbanded. It was alike within the great palace and all Gretzhothen that night—confusion, uncertainty reigned everywhere. Any general could have conquered the capital that night. Only, that meant any general who could have paid his troops the next day!

Kitty needed but one glance at the man she trailed to see it was indeed Count Sachio whose voice she heard. And he had passed as a friend of Count Frederick—as had fellow cell met before the king! So then, her own quick feeling of distrust of Count Sachio when first she met him in the evening hunting lodge had been a thing well placed. She thanked her instinct for the warning.

The men passed now to a little room at one side of the main hall, which traversed that portion of the palace. A pillar toward the interior of the palace, opened from the hall, and Kitty, as she drew up, could see them now—Sachio, and one whose identity she did not know.

"Listen now," she heard Count Sachio's voice boom out, since here they had moved to safety from intrusion. "Listen while I tell you some things. It is the real key to all these matters. It is this document, bearing on the missing treasure, which I have in my hand."

He held rich, but like a miser, hid his gold. He left a clue, yes—he told you all of that. That clue was the broken coin—a coin not so old, but looking old. It may be thirty, perhaps fifty, years old. It was made some time before the king's death. He had his plans all laid for the transmission of the treasure to the proper hands.

"No, that coin was the same as made in the old days. All transfers really, as you remember, were made on parchment, written in pen, and the parchment always was cut in two pieces on a wavy line. In some way, kept half the parchment, the buyer the other half. And always it ran 'Indenture witnesseth.' The 'indenture' was the wavy line which divided the parchment; and the parchment was proof of the transaction, so each holder held half the proof."

"Now, this indenture of the broken coin of Gretzhothen witnessed that Michael the First had transferred to his people his treasure—their treasure—he kept half the deed for himself, or for the man who was to stand for him. In some way he meant to give the people the other half—that is to say, the other half of the indenture went somewhere, no one to this day can guess where, except myself!"

These papers of old told of the torture chamber, somewhere under the fort. Our maps cover that, but they do not mark the spot of the treasure's hiding. Only the old coin restored, indenture to indenture—the one-half to the other—ever can settle that."

"Now, look here, my friend," Count Sachio held up before him a little object, which caused Kitty to start where she stood.

It was the king's coin! Yes, there was the half coin which she with her own hands had sent for delivery to the king on the dancing floor at midnight. It was the king's friend, Count Sachio, by means which he only knew, had been the thief! It now was plain to her. Here was one more claimant for the treasure of the dead king of Gretzhothen.

Count Sachio went on. "This is one-half only of the coin. Alone, it does not

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